

Housing with shared facilities ('houses in multiple occupation')

- 3.265 A house with shared facilities or a house in multiple occupation generally refers to a flat or house that is the main residence for three or more occupiers forming two or more households and who share a kitchen, bathroom or toilet. A household is generally a family (or people with relationships equivalent to a family). The properties covered by Policy H10 mostly take the form of homes let to a group of friends, homes let room-by-room to unrelated individuals, or properties formally divided into bedsits, but also include other types of accommodation where facilities are shared if the occupiers live there long-term (e.g. hostels for migrant workers).
- 3.266 Policy H10 specifically relates to types of housing such as:
- houses and flats shared by 3-6 occupiers who do not live as a family but are long-term residents sharing some rooms and/ or facilities (small houses in multiple occupation or HMOs, Use Class C4) – although different policies apply in different circumstances as set out in paragraph 3.268;
 - houses or flats shared more than six occupiers who do not live as a family but are long-term residents sharing some rooms and/ or facilities (large houses in multiple occupation or HMOs, outside any planning use class); and
 - other accommodation with shared facilities where people live long-term (outside any planning use class), often designated for particular groups, but excluding designated student housing and housing for older people, homeless people and vulnerable people.
- 3.267 Other policies contain specific provisions for some kinds of housing with shared facilities:
- key-worker accommodation such as nurses' homes and hostels is considered in Policies H4 and H5;
 - housing for older people, homeless and vulnerable people is considered in Policy H8;
 - student housing is considered in Policy H9;
 - self-contained houses and flats occupied by a single household are considered in Policies H2, H3, H4, H6 and H7; and
 - provisions for hotels, serviced apartments and hostels aimed at tourists and backpackers are considered in Policy E3.
- 3.268 For most purposes we will treat small houses in multiple occupation (Use Class C4) in the same way as self-contained homes (Use Class C3), to reflect the freedom provided in legislation for changes between these two uses without a planning application. However, where new small homes in multiple occupation are proposed in order to create a long-term addition to the supply of low cost housing, we will consider using planning conditions to remove the freedom to change to self-contained homes without an application. Where the freedom to change from Use Class C4 to Use Class C3 has been removed (e.g. by a planning condition) we will apply Policy H10 and resist the loss of small houses in multiple occupation.

- 3.269 The preceding paragraphs should not be regarded as providing detailed definitions or accounts of the legal position. Planning use classes are set out in The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended). Provisions relating to licensing of some types of housing are set out in the Housing Act 2004 and related secondary legislation.

Policy H10 Housing with shared facilities ('houses in multiple occupation')

The Council will aim to ensure that there is continued provision of housing with shared facilities to meet the needs of small households with limited incomes and modest space requirements.

We will support development of housing with shared facilities (houses in multiple occupation) provided that the development:

- a. will not involve the loss of two or more self-contained homes;
- b. will not involve a site identified for self-contained housing through a current planning permission or a development plan document, unless it is shown that the site is no longer developable for self-contained housing;
- c. complies with any relevant standards for houses in multiple occupation;
- d. contributes to creating a mixed, inclusive and sustainable community;
- e. does not create a harmful concentration of such a use in the local area or cause harm to nearby residential amenity; and
- f. is secured as a long-term addition to the supply of low cost housing, or otherwise provides an appropriate amount of affordable housing, having regard to "Policy H4 Maximising the supply of affordable housing".

We will resist development that involves the net loss of housing with shared facilities (houses in multiple occupation) or the self-containment of any part of such a housing unless either:

- g. it can be demonstrated that the accommodation is incapable of meeting the relevant standards for houses in multiple occupation, or otherwise genuinely incapable of use as housing with shared facilities; or
- h. adequate replacement housing with shared facilities will be provided that satisfies criteria (a) to (f) above; or
- i. the development provides self-contained social-affordable rented homes.

Where the Council is satisfied that a development involving the net loss of homes with shared facilities is justified, we will expect it to create an equivalent amount of floorspace for permanent self-contained housing (in Use Class C3), secured as a long-term addition to the supply of low cost housing, or otherwise providing an appropriate amount of affordable housing, having regard to Policy H4.

- 3.270 The 2011 Census identified 700 homes in the borough that are shared by separate households, providing homes for over 3,000 individuals or households in total. These are likely to be primarily properties where rooms

are let separately to unrelated individuals. On the basis of housing stock data, we estimate that at least 2,300 further homes are being shared by groups who do not form a family. The 2011 Census recorded more than 31,000 households living in privately rented accommodation, of whom over 8,000 are multi-adult households, and it is likely that more than a quarter of private renting households are in a home where they share facilities with one or more unrelated individuals .

- 3.271 Data from the London Rents Map (May 2014) indicates that in Camden rents for a room are typically around 70% of the cost of a studio flat and 50% of the cost of a 1-bed flat. Consultation on Camden's private rented sector suggests that significant proportions of shared accommodation are occupied by students, single males, 40 to 60 year olds, and people who are low wage earners or unemployed. Few single people and couples without children are eligible to be housed by the Council. Single people under 35 can only claim for the cost of a bedsit or room in shared accommodation. Many of the households in shared accommodation would not be able to access or afford self-contained accommodation.

Additional housing with shared facilities

- 3.272 Given that planning legislation provides freedom for changes in either direction between self-contained homes in Use Class C3 and small houses in multiple occupation in Use Class C4, the sector has scope to expand and contract in accordance with relative demand in each sector. Consequently, aside from housing designated for particular groups (such as students and older people), the Council does not currently anticipate a significant number of proposals for development creating new homes with shared facilities. Nevertheless, given the rapid growth of the private rented sector in the borough there is certainly potential for new types of shared accommodation to emerge, such as accommodation modelled on student housing but available to a wider range of occupiers. Consequently Policy H10 provides criteria for assessing such proposals. Further details will be provided in our supplementary planning document Camden Planning Guidance on housing as appropriate.
- 3.273 Policy H1 indicates that self-contained housing is the priority land-use of the Plan, while Policy H3 resists proposals involving the net loss of two or more homes. Given this priority, we will resist proposals for houses in multiple occupation which involve redeveloping two or more self-contained homes, or the development of a site allocated for self-contained homes in the Camden Site Allocations document. We will also resist proposals involving the development of a site that has an existing consent for self-contained housing where the consented scheme would better meet Camden's housing needs and there is a reasonable prospect of the consent being implemented. With the exception of student housing, there is no recent history in Camden of significant new build development for homes with shared facilities, and no reason to suppose that it will prejudice the Council's ability to meet our target for additional self-contained homes.
- 3.274 In accordance with the Housing Act 2004, the Council has agreed minimum standards for houses in multiple occupation and other homes with shared facilities. These standards set minimum sizes for bedroom, bathroom and

kitchen areas, and the minimum facilities that should be provided for occupiers. We will resist proposals that fail to comply with the relevant minimum standards.

- 3.275 We will consider whether proposals could reduce mix, inclusivity and sustainability of a neighbourhood, for example whether large-scale accommodation or additions to an existing concentration could skew the population towards particular groups or lifestyles. We will also consider the potential for harm to nearby residential amenity, for example from residents congregating in outside areas close to other homes. Where appropriate we will seek a planning obligation to protect amenity, for example by securing a management plan.
- 3.276 The Council's priority land-use is self-contained housing, which is generally required to provide affordable housing. Policy H10 therefore includes measures to ensure that financial viability is not tilted towards development of housing with shared facilities. We support continued provision of housing with shared facilities for people with low incomes, and where proposals are intended for low-income occupiers we will negotiate planning obligations to ensure that housing is available to low income occupiers in the long-term. However, new forms of housing with shared facilities could potentially be aimed at providing high density Central London living for relatively wealthy young people, with facilities such as gyms, swimming pools and restaurants. Where proposals come forward that cannot be secured for low income occupiers, we will seek provision of an appropriate amount of affordable housing in accordance with "Policy H4 Maximising the supply of affordable housing" taking account of the additional residential floorspace proposed and its capacity for self-contained homes.

Existing housing with shared facilities

- 3.277 The Council protects housing with shared facilities because many individuals and couples in Camden would be unable to access or afford anything else (as referred to in paragraph 3.271). Despite this protection, there are some indications that the number of homes with shared facilities has diminished in recent years. Estimates based on the Private Sector House Condition Survey 2004 suggest that 11,000 households were living in bedsits or other shared accommodation, predominantly in the private rented sector. More recent housing stock data suggests that this number could have halved (see paragraph 3.270). Developments leading to a loss of housing with shared facilities have tended to involve either self-containing the existing bedsits (putting pressure on internal space by adding facilities for personal use), converting the property into larger flats, or creating a single large dwelling for one household.
- 3.278 The gap between rents for studio flats and rents for rooms in shared accommodation indicates that rents for bedsits will increase as a consequence of self-containment (not necessarily rents charged to existing tenants, but certainly rents charged to new ones). Self-containing bedsits therefore reduces the amount of accommodation available to single people and couples with the lowest incomes. Self-containment also tends to involve the loss of access to previously shared spaces, such as kitchens, sitting rooms or gardens, laundries and drying areas, and bathrooms containing a bath. However, the bedsit itself is rarely large enough to contain a full range of facilities, or to provide space to socialise with visitors.

- 3.279 The Council's minimum space standards for houses in multiple occupation, set under the Housing Act 2004, provide for single rooms as small as 9sqm and double rooms as small as 11sqm. Additional space is required where kitchen facilities, baths/ showers or toilets are provided in the room so that occupiers can move around and use them safely. The Council's standards would require at least 4.2sqm to be added if the room contains kitchen facilities, a wash basin, a shower and a toilet, but this would not be sufficient for all the facilities tenants would often expect, such as freezers and washing machines. The Government's nationally described space standard is much more demanding, with 37sqm given as the minimum standard for a self-contained flat. The limited space in existing bedsits means that self-containment tends to create hazards, such as conflict between cooking facilities and beds or doors.
- 3.280 Converting a home with shared facilities into a single large dwelling or a number of flats larger than the existing bedsits would reduce the amount of accommodation available to small households on low incomes, and would also be likely to reduce the number of people occupying the property. Homes with just one room for sleeping tend to be the most densely occupied as they have no further bedrooms to leave vacant. Camden's Survey of New Housing 2002-2008 did not include bedsits, but found that the number of occupiers per bedroom for studio and 1-bedroom homes was significantly higher than the number in larger homes. Notably, 3-bedroom homes had an average of less than one occupier per bedroom.
- 3.281 Nevertheless, the Council is actively working to improve the quality of accommodation in the private rented sector, particularly houses in multiple occupation. Where such properties do not meet current standards, are in serious disrepair, or have a history of vacancy, we will assess the form of renovation or development best able to provide residential accommodation of reasonable quality, and may accept self-containment in some circumstances. The Council will consider the extent of the works required to meet contemporary standards, their likely impact on any designated heritage assets, the cost of restoring the property to use (having regard to any fixtures and fittings removed from the property by the owner), the potential rental return from the property, and the prospect of investment coming forward to make the property suitable for occupation as housing with shared facilities.
- 3.282 In the past, Camden's policies for development of self-contained homes have required provision of affordable housing, but no similar policies have applied to housing with shared facilities. Consequently where we consider that proposals for self-containment of shared accommodation are the best option, we will seek appropriate provision of affordable housing or other low cost accommodation. The Council will generally favour solutions that secure long-term provision of housing suitable for small households with limited incomes. Where there is a long history of vacancy we may agree arrangements that secure the availability of some or all of the property for homeless or vulnerable people for a fixed period. Where we are unable to secure properties that have been self-contained as low cost housing for small households, homeless people or vulnerable people, we will seek an appropriate contribution to affordable housing in accordance with "Policy H4 Maximising the supply of affordable housing". Further details will be provided as necessary in our supplementary planning document Camden Planning Guidance on housing.

- 3.283 Proposals to replace existing bedsit accommodation, or other housing with shared facilities, usually involve relocating it into an existing self-contained dwelling, and converting the shared accommodation into one or more larger self-contained homes. Such swaps can help a developer or owner to meet a demand for self-contained accommodation in a particular location, provide bedsits in a property that can more easily meet contemporary standards, and/or maximise the value of properties in their control. The Council will not resist such swaps as long as the replacement bedsits are in an appropriate location, represent equivalent or better accommodation (in terms of the number of bedsits, the floorspace, and the standard of facilities and amenities), and are secured by a planning obligation.
- 3.284 There is a small stock of social rented housing in the borough that takes the form of bedsit rooms with communal facilities. Small homes are over-represented in this sector, and bedsits are very unpopular with tenants, especially since they will be sharing facilities with people they don't know, often people classed as vulnerable people and sometimes people with challenging behaviour. The Council therefore supports development or remodelling of social rented accommodation with shared facilities to create self-contained social-affordable rented homes, subject to the self-contained homes meeting appropriate space standards.
- 3.285 In some cases, properties in Camden have been subdivided into flats that are not self-contained because the layout of entrance halls and staircases made self-containment difficult or costly. Where these properties are not let out as bedsits and only share circulation spaces, they do not form housing with shared facilities, and the Council will not resist proposals to convert the properties into wholly self-contained flats provided that they are able create homes of a reasonable layout and quality. Where such proposals would result in a loss of homes, they will be considered against Policy H3.